



Chapter XVI

Building a Paperless Service: Making the Internship Connection

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Central Ridge University¹ (CRU) is a large, research-oriented university composed of 10 major colleges, connecting over 15 branch campuses, and offering various continuing, distance, outreach and executive programs. One of the major colleges of CRU is The College of Business Administration (CBA). CBA maintains an optional internship program for its undergraduate and MBA populations. CBA strongly recommends its students to experience the corporate world by doing an internship before their graduation. Also, CBA students seek the internship experience to complement their academic courses. The Internship Office of CBA is charged with the responsibility of facilitating students' contacts with corporate clients. In order to do so, the office must gather, record, and disseminate information to students and to corporations. In addition, the information must be kept private, accurate, and comprehensive. Typical information processes existing in the Internship Office relied heavily on paper entries, paper duplication, and mailings. However, in the Internship Office, the use of technology was lagging. An end user within the Internship Office was enlisted to develop an information technology solution to the paper-intensive tasks of the office. Issues of the case study include (1) the organizational behavior issues to overcome when implementing

information technology even in an enthusiastic and sympathetic organization, (2) the difficulties in defining a system by an end user even a sophisticated one, and (3) the obstacles of implementing a satisfactory system under tight time and security constraints even with the cooperation of a systems department.

BACKGROUND

Central Ridge University (CRU) is a large, research-oriented, public university composed of 10 major colleges, connecting over 15 branch campuses, and offering various continuing, distance, outreach and executive programs. Through this massive educational network, approximately 100,000 individuals each year study in a program affiliated with CRU. In order to keep pace with the demands of its broad-based and popular programs, CRU is an aggressive leader in deploying information technology in order to realize its mission to provide high-quality education to its students.

About five years ago, CRU instituted e-mail accounts for all of its students, staff, faculty and administrators—regardless of their discipline, interest, or desire. CRU wanted its primary participants to have an electronic, always available, always vigilant access to one another. From the president of the university to the night watchman to incoming freshmen, CRU issued e-mail accounts. To support the effort, introductory and training sessions were provided to familiarize everyone; electronic kiosks were established for quick communications; state-of-the-art, high-capacity labs and networks were installed to handle the increased resource demand; information centers were staffed to be readily available for end users' questions and university-wide licensed, communications software was offered to all university individuals and units. What resulted was a university-wide temperament for doing work, academics, communications, and appointments electronically without constraints.

One of the major colleges within CRU is The College of Business Administration (CBA). CBA accounts for about 10% of the student population of CRU, approximately 10,000 students. Its offerings span baccalaureate, masters, MBA, doctoral and executive programs through resident and distance education. Several of its departments are nationally and internationally recognized, often being forerunners in their fields.

A significant feature of CBA is the strong ties it fosters with corporations. Through a variety of programs, CBA cultivates relationships with corporations. Likewise, corporations eagerly strive to align themselves with CBA. The Internship Program realizes one strong symbiotic association between CBA and corporations. Initiated in 1978, this program helps CBA students find four- to eight-month work assignments at corporations prior to graduation. Students receive the benefit of practicing the skills from the classroom in a "real" work environment. Companies receive the benefit of assessing a student's skills without a long-term employment commitment. In fact, during downturns in the economy, companies use their internship population as pre-screened employees and students can usually rely on their internship site for a job offering.

The Internship Office manages the Internship Program of CBA. The office has counterparts in the other colleges of CRU, but acts independently of these other internship offices in all aspects of its functioning. The Internship Office is one part of a group of services handled by the Corporate Support Alliance of CBA, an administrative

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